

FUJI RHP III

THE CREATIVE GENTLEMAN'S LEISURELY TOUR

NME travels to Portugal, where **Radiohead** are bamboozling all comers, with up to 16 new 'shagging' songs, Ed and Jonny on drums, and a new moon promising great things on the horizon

Text: Johnny Davis Photography: Tom Sheehan

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'Head boy: Thom Yorke stalks the stage at the Coliseu De Lisboa

Thom learns how to rock again, using his teeth

Jonny looks for his packed lunch in the middle of the two-and-a-half hour set

"No, me first!": Colin and Ed fight over the effects pedals

So what's the new Radiohead album going to sound like? Tough call. At this stage in their twisty turny career, the only safe bet would be on expecting the unexpected. After all, where *haven't* they gone before?

And yet... when Radiohead take to the stage to play a bunch of brand new songs, even 'expecting the unexpected' isn't enough to prepare you for the sight of Jonny Greenwood and Ed O'Brien ignoring their guitars for two giant tom tom drums and thumping out a glam Glitter Band beat while the rest of the group charge through a three-minute stomper. 'Amnesiac'? A memory. Here's the news: Radiohead have learned how to rock again. In their own special way, of course.

Radiohead have come to Lisbon to play some new songs. They like it abroad. If their 1998 film *Meeting People Is Easy* was an exercise in showing just how miserable flying around the world playing your favourite hits to thousands of adoring fans could possibly be for a rock star, maybe you caught them on a bad year.

Throughout their ten-year career, Radiohead have proved themselves to be one of the few truly international groups. 'Creep' was first a hit in, of all places, Israel. The early-'90s saw America embracing them while Britain shrugged its shoulders. In 1997 they launched 'OK Computer' with shows in Barcelona. More recently, while the caustic electronica of 'Kid A' and 'Amnesiac' caused 'what the bloody hell are you up to now?' consternation in the UK, around the rest of the world those albums stomped to the top of the charts. If Radiohead's relationship with British life – politics, royalty, media – has been antagonistic, abroad is where the group have often felt most at home, most free, and most able to do whatever it is they like.

For the next three weeks then, Radiohead will travel around Portugal and Spain playing live. The plan is to

try out 16 new songs they've written, find out which ones they like best, find out which ones the audiences like best and then go and record them. Easy. You wonder why, through the famously torturous recording sessions for 'The Bends' and 'OK Computer', they made life so difficult for themselves (and, ho ho, with 'Kid A' and 'Amnesiac', so difficult for us). But, as we'll see, this is a whole new Radiohead we're dealing with.

"We've earned our right to do this," Thom Yorke will say in the wee small hours of the morning, two days later, clutching a local beer to his half-beard. "With 'OK Computer' they pushed and pushed us around the world – 'One more gig here, one more gig there'. Now we get to play nice shows in nice places in Europe."

"It's the Creative Gentleman's Leisurely Tour," agrees bass player Colin Greenwood. "You know, Panama hat, diary, soaking up the culture as you go along."

"Why Portugal?" snorts Thom. "Don't ask me. It was Ed's idea." The Coliseu De Lisboa is the venue that guitarist Ed O'Brien chose to start this jaunt and, frankly, who can blame him? In the heart of Lisbon's cobbled centre, it's a beautiful, 12th century, five-tiered indoor amphitheatre. Colin is so enthusiastic about the venue's history, he can barely contain himself. "It's magnificent. They had elephants in there, you know."

At 5pm on a muggy Monday afternoon, the elephants have long since packed their trunks. Instead, a mostly teenage crowd of fans start to gather outside. Although Radiohead won't play for another five hours, the fans sit on the cobbled pavement, patiently smoking cigarettes and eating popcorn. Nobody gets horribly drunk, nobody starts chucking beer about and the toilets remain casualty-free. Oasis at Finsbury Park it's not.

Having stretched the definition of rock music to snapping point through 'OK Computer' ('Paranoid Android'

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– six-and-a-half minutes long, no chorus, three unrelated musical sections) to 'Kid A' ('In Limbo' – made-up chords, strange time signatures) to 'Amnesiac' ('Dollars And Cents' – gibberish meltdown), in two interviews in June 2001, Thom Yorke offered a few clues to Radiohead post-'Amnesiac': that he "missed" the sound of guitars but that "so-called commercial melodies (*were like*) being besieged by a wasp; you just want (*them*) to go away".

When the house lights go down and Ed and Jonny start banging their tom toms to first newie 'There There', it's clear that it's the simplest, most direct thing Radiohead have done in years. Propelled along by its voodoo beat, the chorus goes, "Just 'cos you feel it/ Doesn't mean it's real". It's great.

"We thought it should be, 'They're back!'" Colin Greenwood will say after the show. "We thought it might be a bit cheesy with two drummers, like ('80s soul-punks) The Redskins... but it's cool."

If the song is instant sunshine itself, it's nothing compared to the joy beaming out from the band. Colin pogos up and down, Ed and Thom grin daft 'look at us!' grins, Jonny dances about and Phil Selway makes up for having to sit behind the drums by wearing a shirt so loud its label should read 'Stag Weekends Only'.

This, apparently, is the new, energised Radiohead. Radiohead Mk6 (at the very least). They're fitter, happier, more reductive: the nine new songs they premiere on the opening night are way more stripped-back than what's gone before. Played almost entirely on bass,

"It's like going to the fucking theatre, having an interval," he says. "And it's bloody weird going off after eight songs."

But, back onstage on the first night, the mood remains insanely chipper. 'Scatterbrain' has a simple guitar coda reminiscent of The Smiths' 'Back To The Old House': short, bitter and featuring Thom a-prancing and a-preening for the audience. Three-minute rocket 'Up On The Ladder' finds Thom revving up his Ian Curtis-goes-to-Trade dance, features a lovely up-and-down bass guitar wiggle and would be Britpop if they hadn't stuck the whole thing through a funny filter.

The piano gets wheeled on for next song, 'We Suck Young Blood'. Thom trips over it, goofs for the audience and asks the band, "Who starts this? Oh, me." It's somewhere near Nick Cave's 'The Ship Song' sung falsetto and featuring an odd 30-second jazz drum break near the end. While it could possibly be sent home from a funeral for being too doomy – it starts "Are you sick?/Are you worried?/Are you begging for a break?" – the gothic effect is undercut by Colin strutting up and down the stage, clearly having the time of his life.

Next, 'I Will' is the closest relation to 'The Bends'-era Radiohead, most notably 'Street Spirit (Fade Out)'. It's two-and-a-half minutes long and showcases some wonderful vocal gymnastics from Thom. Shorter still is 'Sail To The Moon' which starts with a delayed riff played through from Ed's pedals. Things go bananas for the best new song of the night, 'Myxomatosis'. Built around a crunchy guitar riff, it's a creepy pop thumper up there with R Dean Taylor's

NME: How are you going to judge whether a new song is 'working'?
Thom Yorke: "If a song works really well then we won't play it the next night. If people respond well to it, then we've tried it out. We don't want to get bored. That's not such good news for the audience, but (*filthy laugh*) tough shit!"

The last time you tried out lots of new material live it was on Alanis Morissette fans, pre-'OK Computer'.
"That was great. We were supporting her in these sheds all over northwest America. We did a set of all new stuff. You had all these good ol' boys in the audience thinking '(*Crosses arms, looks suspicious*) Hmmm...' Then we'd go, 'This is an old one' and do 'High And Dry'. That was the only old song."

Was it easy to get these new songs to this stage?
"Was it easy? No. The nine weeks' rehearsal before these shows was not easy. It's easy now. But we all had six months off (*between touring 'Kid A'/'Amnesiac'*) which is the longest we've ever had off. We were sending tapes to each other with ideas (*for songs*). Which is how we did 'OK Computer'."

Are you optimistic about going back into the studio? It's driven you to distraction before...
"Well, the idea is not to use any computers on this record. (*Mirthless laugh*) Ha! We'll see how long that lasts."

With 'Kid A' and 'Amnesiac', you wouldn't let the rest of the band see any of your lyrics. They said that made writing the music really hard. Did you let them see them this time?
"Oh yes."

Last year you said that your ambition was to make a record that 'makes you want to have sex'. Is this it?
"(*Huge grin*) Yeah! Definitely. Too right we're making a shagging record."

Are you sure? Some of these songs sound, um, a bit off-putting...
"I think so. Some of the rhythms are definitely for shagging. If you like to shag very, very slowly. At 80bpm."

After the show, Radiohead are triumphant. "I love everybody, you know?" beams Colin over his Caipirinha. "Thom just said, 'If you fuck up, don't worry. It's not Madison Square Garden. We're here to enjoy ourselves.'"

"Some of the rhythms are definitely for shagging. If you like to shag very, very slowly. At 80bpm"

Thom Yorke

Colin talks of their plans for the new album. "We fly to LA at the end of August. (*Long-time producer*) Nigel Godrich rents a space there. We're going to spend two weeks working. The plan is like with 'OK Computer' – we'll have loads of songs we know and it'll just be (*mimes dumping a pile of books on the table*)... there!"

He thinks about this: "It means we'll be in America for September 11. Which will be interesting."

They hope to release the new LP, their sixth studio album, in March next year. There's a discussion about the new songs. Since Thom didn't introduce most of them onstage, people are curious about the titles. Have they really called a song 'A Punch Up At A Wedding'? They have. Thom finds the fuss over the titles funny. "I should have handed out lyric sheets to the audience," he says, which seems like such a terribly un-Radiohead thing to do (for a band who, as 'artists', hate the idea of giving anything away for fear it will spirit the 'art' itself into nothingness) that we assume it's a joke. But the next afternoon, the previous night's setlist, plus the lyrics to 'Myxomatosis' are posted under NME's hotel door. These are the first two verses:

The mongrel cat came home/Holding half a head/Proceeded to show it off/To all his new-found friends/He said I been where I liked/I slept with who I liked/She ate me up for breakfast/And screwed me in a vice/But now I don't know why I feel so tongue tied

I sat in the cupboard/And wrote it down neat/They were cheering and waving/Cheering and waving/Twitching and salivating like with myxomatosis/But it got edited fucked up/Strangled beaten up/Used in a photo in Time magazine/Buried in a burning black hole in Devon/And I don't know why I feel so tongue tied/I don't know why I feel so skinned alive

The following night – two of three at the Coliseu De Lisboa – sees Radiohead dispense with the interval, as promised. Instead of the clean break between material, the old and the new are mixed

together. They do 'There There', 'Scatterbrain', 'Sail To The Moon', 'A Punch Up At A Wedding', 'Myxomatosis', 'We Suck Young Blood' plus three completely new songs: 'Wolf From The Door', 'Sit Down. Stand Up' and 'Go To Sleep'. 'Wolf From The Door' features a spidery guitar line from Ed and has Thom struggling to cram all his words in. 'Sit Down. Stand Up' starts with a simple keyboard motif, before Jonny dumps a load of sampled noises over the top, slowly speeding the drums up on his bank of gizmos until the bpm is well over 'slow shag'. It ends with Thom shouting "Raindrops!/Raindrops!/Raindrops!" over and over. It's the fastest thing they've ever done and goes down so well, Thom deems it unnecessary for inclusion in any upcoming sets. By contrast, 'Go To Sleep' has Jonny, Thom and Ed chiming away on their guitars and is the sort of Rickenbacker loveliness once epitomised by REM.

Thom Yorke thinks a full moon brings him luck. He slumps in an armchair on the 30th floor of his hotel, baggy CND-badged jacket hanging off his tiny limbs, and looks up at the sky.

"I'm not joking," he says. "Every time there's a full moon, something good happens. Not finding money, or anything like that. Creative things."

The muse?
"Yeah, that's it," he says. Then he realises what he's saying. "What a wanker!" Radiohead came offstage some hours ago, and they're still trying to wind down. Colin searches his pocket for weed, to no avail. Phil Selway walks drunkenly into a chair and Ed is nowhere to be seen. Earlier, Thom was sat at the hotel's baby grand piano, playing more to himself than anyone else. In a few minutes, a debate about the funding of the BBC will start. It will lead Thom to declare, "Radio 4: *The Today Programme, World At One...* John Humphrys. He's a man you can trust. That's all I listen to now, Radio 4. I haven't listened to any techno for ages."

SEE NEXT WEEK'S NME FOR MORE ON RADIOHEAD'S TOUR AND THE DEFINITIVE BREAKDOWN OF ALL THEIR NEW SONGS

"That's all I listen to now, Radio 4. I haven't listened to any techno for ages" Thom Yorke

guitars and drums, they lack the drum machine shenanigans of, say, 'Idiotique' or the Pink Floyd keyboard wash of 'The Tourist'. All of them would sound as out of place on 'Kid A' as anything off 'Kid A' would on 'The Bends'.

Though Radiohead have 16 songs rehearsed and ready to play, they plan to perform just a handful each night. To keep things interesting, they'll move them about as they see fit. Tonight they split the show into two. First, it's eight new songs. Then there's a 20-minute interval. Then it's back on for 18 songs the audience know. By the second night it's a plan that's been scrapped. At two-and-a-half hours the show is too long, and Thom has lost patience with the interval idea.

'There's A Ghost In My House'. Thom sings from a lyric sheet perched on a music stand and plays a tiny, round-neck Yamaha keyboard.

'A Punch Up At A Wedding' is the last song in the first half. It combines a slow handclap drumbeat with Thom playing repeated house chords on the piano. At seven minutes, it's their longest new tune and ends with Thom screaming his lungs out. The second 'hits' section includes 'I Could Be Wrong', 'Karma Police', 'Morning Bell', 'Paranoid Android', 'Exit Music (For A Film)', 'The Bends', plus legendary 'lost' single 'Lift'. During 'Everything In Its Right Place', Thom climbs down from the stage and shakes hands with as many people in the front row as he can.



Everyone in the right place:
Thom does a meet'n'greet